

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview and Mission Statement of Business Plan

Various efforts have been undertaken to develop guidance and planning documents for the improvement of the Route 99 corridor through the San Joaquin Valley. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Great Valley Center (GVC) have been key leaders and participants in these efforts. Most recently, Caltrans completed a final draft of the *Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan* for the 274-mile segment of Route 99 from its junction with Interstate 5 in Kern County, to the northern limits of San Joaquin County. While this Master Plan focused on enhancing the appearance of the corridor and the driving experience for those using it, it also recognized the need for significant improvements to route safety, capacity, operations, and road conditions. The Master Plan was developed in conjunction with the GVC, the eight Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the San Joaquin Valley, and the GVC Highway 99 Task Force. Developing a Route 99 Corridor Business Plan is the next step in these efforts to improve the corridor.

The Business Plan was written with the purpose of providing decision-makers an implementation plan to achieve the goals identified in the various planning documents written for the route. Two of these, the Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan (ITSP) and the Transportation Concept Reports (TCRs), establish the primary goals for the route. These documents are discussed later in Section 3.1 of this report.

This Business Plan is a “nuts and bolts” approach to achieving the functional goals laid out in the ITSP, the TCRs, and the Enhancement Master Plan. By clearly identifying Caltrans’ long-term goals—and a corresponding list of prioritized projects to achieve those goals—the ability to make funding decisions regarding the corridor as a whole will be much easier. In addition to the extensive list of prioritized projects, this document will recommend strategies that could enhance the continuity of the corridor, while reducing overall costs and time in the project development process.

The focus of this Business Plan is on major facility improvements that would typically be funded through the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or similar programs. While the Business Plan will touch on some projects that could be funded by the State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP), that is not its focus. In general terms, the STIP provides for capacity-increasing projects while the SHOPP is focused primarily on maintaining and operating the existing State highway system. These programs are both discussed in further detail later in this report.



While the focus of the projects identified in this Business Plan is those that increase capacity or improve operations, safety is still the single most important consideration for Route 99. Safety projects are typically funded and delivered through the SHOPP; however, it should be recognized that capacity-increasing projects and operational improvement projects will typically contain safety elements. These elements may vary from the installation of median barriers, to the closing of at-grade intersections, to the installation of signal lights at ramp intersections. In reality, some of the more serious safety issues on the route, specifically the at-grade intersections, are beyond the ability of the SHOPP to remedy and must be built as a part of the STIP.

## 1.2 Goals of Business Plan

The overall objective of the Business Plan is to provide a cohesive approach for transportation decision-makers to use when addressing the Route 99 corridor through the San Joaquin Valley.

The following are a list of the goals for this Business Plan:

- Identify major projects that will improve safety, reduce congestion, and facilitate efficient goods movement along the Route 99 corridor.
- Achieve consensus among Caltrans and the MPOs in the San Joaquin Valley on the priority that will be given to different classifications of projects.
- Identify a comprehensive list of major road projects to be completed along the corridor.
- Develop strategies to improve the long-term success of all projects.
- Discuss Interstate designation for the route.
- Identify strategies for influencing land use decisions along the route.
- Identify current and future potential funding sources and strategies.
- Identify the economic benefit associated with an improved transportation corridor.
- Determine the proper phasing of construction to most efficiently invest funds in a timely manner.

## 1.3 Challenges

Route 99 is an integral part of the State highway system and crosses many diverse areas. The effort to produce a Route 99 Corridor Business Plan will require input and consensus between Caltrans and local partners. At a minimum, Caltrans faces the following challenges:

- Reaching consensus: Caltrans will work together with Valley MPOs to reach agreement on the priority and funding of projects to be constructed.
- Identifying traditional and non-traditional funding sources: The improvements identified in this report are well beyond the ability of existing State Transportation Improvement Program,

or STIP<sup>1</sup>, revenues to finance. Alternative funding sources must be identified to implement these improvements in a timely manner.

- Phasing funds to match capacity to deliver: If all funding were provided in a “lump sum,” it would far exceed the ability of Caltrans and the construction industry to complete the work. Complex capital improvement projects typically take from 9 to 14 years from inception of studies to completion of construction. It will take Caltrans some time to “ramp up” the delivery effort and it is doubtful that construction contractors will immediately have the ability to absorb all of this work.
- Gaining resource agency approvals in advance of construction: Obtaining approval of the environmental documents, as well as obtaining permits from affected resource agencies, is typically the controlling operation for the first five years of a project’s schedule. Because of the potential magnitude of the investment considered in this report, there may be significant opportunity to obtain early consensus from resource agencies through pre-mitigation for groupings of projects. Although this potential exists, it has not yet been successfully accomplished in the State. Advance mitigation for large sections of freeway will require close cooperation with multiple federal and State agencies.

## **1.4 Local and Regional Cooperation**

In an effort to gain the cooperation and consensus necessary to accomplish such a large task, multiple meetings have been held with Caltrans’ local partners. The following is a list of the agencies and groups that have been involved in development of this plan:

- Kern Council of Governments
- Kings County Association of Governments
- Tulare County Association of Governments
- Council of Fresno County Governments
- Madera County Transportation Commission
- Merced County Association of Governments
- Stanislaus Council of Governments
- San Joaquin Council of Governments
- Great Valley Center
- Highway 99 Task Force
- Caltrans, Districts 6 (Fresno) and 10 (Stockton)

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<sup>1</sup> (The STIP is composed of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program or RTIP, and the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program or ITIP.)

